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# Youth Identities: Media Discourse in the Formation of Youth Identity

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## Introduction

In today's postmodern society the media has become as important as food and clothing. It plays a significant role in 'informing' a society and notably our current generation of children and young people spend more time with media than engaged in any other activity (Zemmels 2012).

Using data from a recent qualitative study of teenagers attending Millgate Community School's Extended Day and Residential facility this chapter seeks to uncover some of the ways in which the media, in its multimodality, shapes youth's personal and social identity and sense of belonging. In carrying out the research I was particularly concerned with how the media influences the identities and aspirations of youth and also how youth use the media to define self. Individual decisions about *who they are* and their lifestyle choices, while often appearing to be unbounded and, therefore, solely a consequence of agency, are, in reality, made within cultural and social constraints, what Bourdieu (1977) terms 'habitus'. In my small-scale study of youth's everyday encounters with the media, Bourdieu's theory of habitus provides the theoretical framework from which to examine how the media impacts on youth perspectives within the cultural and social contexts of their community.

This chapter begins with unravelling what is meant by identity and how the sense of self emerges from our earliest experiences and what others do to us and for us. It then moves on to explore the way in which media has potentially profound effects on the social identity formation of young people. The chapter will present ideas concerning new technologies such as digital media, internet and social networking sites and the way they have transformed youth culture

in the home, school and community. Discussion will include the way in which youth culture draws from the media to collectively construct what is valuable and worthwhile including how adolescents develop identities by adapting to these peer cultures through social processes (Manago et al. 2012; Larson 1995). Finally, by allowing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between youth identity and the media I intend to reverse the traditional research stance which focuses on what the media does to children and youth (Heim et al. 2007) by discussing instead what children and youth do with the media in developing their own intersectional identities within a postmodern society.

## Unravelling what is meant by identity

I wonder if I've been changed in the night? let me think, was I the  
same when I got up in the morning? I almost think I can remember  
feeling different. But if I am not the same, the next question is  
'who in the world I am? As that's the great puzzle.

– *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll

Alice's words are both nonsensical and comprehensible yet serve to illustrate the struggle many young people experience in developing a clear sense of self or identity. As Buckingham (2008: 1) points out, '[I]dentity is an ambiguous and slippery term'

In unravelling what is meant by 'identity' it can be useful to distinguish between two main types. There is the personal identity, which Alice is grappling with, and there is something often referred to as the 'social identity'. Social identity theory posits that a portion of one's self-concept is dependent on the importance and relevance placed on the group membership(s) to which an individual belongs (Turner & Oakes 1986).

By contrast dictionary definitions of 'identity' tend to reflect a more simplistic notion of 'identity' made popular during the 1950s by the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1959; 1968) through his work on psychosocial stages of development and his coining of the term 'identity crisis. For example: 'The characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is' (OED, Online).

Erikson's concept of 'ego identity', a term extending from Freud's (1938) psychoanalytic personality theory, suggested that identity is shaped by the interaction of three elements: a person's biological characteristics, their psychology and the cultural context. Erikson focused on the concept of identity as it emerged

and changed in developmental stages across the life course but that in childhood it was only a provisional type of identity, for example, in role playing or when girls want to be princesses and boys want to be superheroes. In Erikson's view such identifications do not have the same depth and directing functions as those of adult identity, believing that the essential development of proper identity takes place during the period of youth. According to him the development of a coherent and organized sense of identity is a key task in adolescence (Erikson 1950; 1968; Illeris 2014). Erikson proposes that, in order to move on, adolescents must undergo a 'crisis' in which they address key questions about their values and ideals, their future occupation or career and their sexual identity. Through this process of self-reflection and self-definition, adolescents arrive at an integrated, coherent sense of their identity as something that persists over time (Buckingham 2008). Erikson's use of the term 'crisis' reflects the tradition of treating adolescence as a period of *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress) imported into psychology, from German literature in the late 1880s by the American psychologist Granville Stanley Hall who is usually accredited with the 'discovery' of adolescence (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997). Ching and Foley (2012) point out that Erikson's description of what he believed to be a universal picture of human development based on the experiences of Western middle-class individuals has come under criticism. Erikson, like many of his contemporaries in early developmental psychology such as Piaget (1969), sought to articulate a universal hierarchical framework of development that could account for human change over time. It is particularly the aspiration for a universal, stage based model of development that lacks resonance in the context of a new discourse on human development that privileges the long-neglected role of culture (Hammock 2008). Rogoff (2003) reinforces the view that human development must be understood as a cultural process, not simply a biological or psychological one.

A number of individuals have attempted to extract operational definitions and to derive testable models and hypotheses from Erikson's writings. The most commonly used conceptualization of Erikson's identity theory is Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm. Building on Erikson's account, Marcia focused on the notion of adolescence as a period of 'identity crisis. Through this period, the young person has to consider potential life choices and eventually make a commitment or psychological investment in particular decisions. Marcia suggested, based on the amount of exploration and commitment,<sup>1</sup> that an adolescent's identity can be classified into either one of four distinguishable identity statuses: *diffusion*, which is low in exploration and low on commitment; *foreclosure*, which is little exploration but strong commitments; *moratorium*, which is

high on exploration but no stable commitments as yet; and *achievement*, which is high on commitment after a period of extensive exploration (cited in Klimstra et al. 2010). Much of the research in identity formation has traditionally used Marcia's identity status paradigm to examine the ways in which adolescents move through a period of identity exploration to a state of commitment, that is, dedication to an autonomously negotiated set of stable self-structures that is adaptive to one's social world (Manago 2015). From this perspective, adolescence is seen primarily as a state of transition, a matter of 'becoming' rather than 'being'. A further perspective is that adolescents' key dilemmas are to do with what they will become, particularly in terms of their future occupation and their relationships; their current experiences are only significant insofar as they help them resolve their crisis and hence move on (Buckingham 2008). However, Marcia's identity status paradigm is criticized for its narrow focus and its failure to take into account the sociocultural aspects of identity formation (Bennett and Robards 2014). For example, Adam and Marshall's (1996) developmental contextual approach to identity formation draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological mode of development which takes the view that development is influenced by embedded and connected environmental systems.

During adolescence youth are increasingly identifying themselves within social peer groups as they distinguish themselves from their parents or primary carers (Erikson 1959; 1968; Harter 1999). This involvement in the task of identity building leads to concern with marking one's identity for others. According to Deutsch and Theodorou (2010: 231), '[T]his dual exercise, of individuation of self and connection to a social group, results in a relationship with material culture wherein consumption is used to both mark and mask difference.' The omnipresent physical displays of identity through clothing, hairstyles and accessories not only reinforce individual identity but also establishes one's place in the larger peer group (ibid.). Here, identity is about identification with others, presumed as being similar, if not exactly the same, in some significant ways, which brings us back to social identity as mentioned earlier. According to Hammock (2008: 227): '[T]o understand the full embellishment of an identity, beyond what Erikson would term its "ego" functions but what we might prefer to dub its purely "cognitive" features, we must theorize the formation of social identity – that part of identity that, as Erikson argued, contains an awareness of an individual's location within the solidarity of a particular group' Using data from my recent small-scale qualitative study of teenagers attending Millgate City School, the chapter moves on to report on some of the ways in which the media, in its multimodality, shapes youth's identity both personal and social.

In order to place the teenagers' narratives into context the next section of the chapter discusses the influence of media in youth identity formation.

## Media and the construction of identity

The sociocultural context in which young people live is characterized by competing, complementary and divergent values and beliefs provided by parents, school, the consumer society, peer relations and of course the media. However it is this last element that has gained significant importance as it has come to play a more central role in the way children and young people interpret the world, particularly since the inception of the internet (Marôpo 2014). Part of young peoples lived experiences growing up in the United Kingdom and other industrialized countries around the world is the frequent exposure and often daily use of a variety of media. Media has potentially profound effects on the social identity formation of young people. The various media including local radio, film, television, music and print media such as magazines, newspapers and comic books privilege either sight or sound, or both as well as playing on a broad range of emotions influencing how young people think and behave and how they construct their identities. According to Kellner (2003: 1): 'Media culture provides the material to create identities whereby individuals insert themselves into contemporary techno-capital societies and which is producing a new form of global culture' Emerging from his concerns about the dominance of television Gerbner et al. (1994) pointed out as far back as 1994 that children heard more stories and facts through different media than through parents, schools or community. Livingstone (2002) identified this phenomenon as a mediated childhood which emphasizes the role of media and its importance for children and young people in everyday life. In contrast to over twenty years ago television is viewed in different ways depending on the audience. Many young people in current times use devices to 'zap' from one programme to another, channel 'hopping' or 'grazing' to merely see what is happening and to go with the disconnected flow of images (Kellner 2003). A more recent notable development in the tie between television and youth media culture is the shift to video sharing internet websites such as YouTube, together with the advanced capabilities of video recording and educating equipment, that has fostered the creation of content for and by youth (Bronner and Clark 2016). Hamley (2001) adds that as we live in a media-saturated environment it is an inevitable consequence that young people make use of imagery derived from the use of popular media to construct their

identity. Similarly Coiro et al. (2008: 526) argue that today's youth experiment with different identities in 'dynamic and shifting constructions and presentations of self'. Furthermore in an era that is often referred to as the 'digital age' children and young people do their learning and entertain themselves through technologies that were unimagined just twenty years ago. Hague and Williamson (2009) concur that many young people are now spending significant amounts of their own social and leisure time using digital media such as video games, social networking sites, video sharing, music editing, animation and different forms of online communication, as well as carrying out a host of more prosaic activities. Media and the tools of modern technology play an important role in the developmental processes of childhood, including adolescence, as they learn 'to find their [*sic*] way around in the world' to discover who they are in relation to the wider human family and their social and physical environment (Edgar and Edgar 2008). For many young people, especially in the industrialized parts of the world, digital media are significant modalities through which they are seeking, consciously or unconsciously, the answers to identity questions, looking for what Buckingham (2008: 28) describes as 'the me that is me'. This also has implications for schools; Buckingham points out that young people need to be equipped with a new form of digital literacy that is both critical and creative. In today's society new technologies and new social practices rapidly and repeatedly redefine what it once meant, in traditional literacy terms, to be able to read, write and communicate effectively in the shared language of a culture. Just as school subjects provide young people with the knowledge and skills to make sense of their world, including its history, geography, religions, arts, languages and sciences, education should also supply the skills and knowledge to make sense of this digital media world. It is worth noting however that the success or otherwise of school-based innovation is often related to local circumstances and to the characteristics of particular schools, teachers and children.

Stemming from Bloom's (1956) original taxonomy of learning domains in 2008 a digital taxonomy was produced which supplied a number of verbs related to technology and media under each of Bloom's headings. This taxonomy suggested that 'creating' in a digital context might involve 'designing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing, devising, making, programming, filming, animating, blogging, video blogging, mixing, re-mixing, wiki-ing, publishing, videocasting, podcasting, directing or broadcasting' (Hague and Williamson 2009: 18). The children and young people who attend the school used in my small-scale study are fortunate as they are given the opportunity to develop these skills as a direct result of attending the extended day and residential facility. For

example, some young people have been involved in film-making. To showcase their work, recent films made by these young people are shown annually at 'The Millgate Oscars' ceremony (Ofsted report, 2016). Research has shown that what young people learn from their participation in film-making indicates that these are learning environments for multimodal production that involve identity construction. Willett et al. (2005:2), for example, argue that 'identity' features prominently in multimodal composition: 'New media production is as much about producing identities and social spaces as it is about creating media . . . Through different media forms young people are described as performing, defining, and exploring their identities' This can be seen in the productions available on the school's YouTube website,<sup>2</sup> most notably 'Mighty Mighty Millgate' which was part of a whole school project nurturing the pupils' clear sense of self and identity.

## The small-scale study

Identities are more like spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcano lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool down and set.

– Bauman (2000: 71)

The study set out to explore a group of young people's quest for identity and the influence the media has on the formation of both their personal and social identity. The influences that shape teenager's choices and the wider challenge that they face to conform to the notion of being media 'savvy' were also explored. I chose to carry out my study in a community school's residential facility, currently operating for five nights a week, term time only, and accommodating up to ten students, as it gave me an opportunity to chat with the young people in a relaxed homely atmosphere. These are young people with emotional, behavioural and social challenges who benefit from the school's ethos and values of 'respect, which is also used as an acronym for responsibility, education, safety, perseverance, excellence, caring and tolerance. This positive approach within the school emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the incapacities of these young people, often from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those with the most troubled histories. Furthermore, experiences that promote a sense of personal identification with one's school and local community provide a young person with a positive set of aspirations that point the way to a socially and personally productive future (Damon 2004).



Who I Am –	Name	Age
Thanks for taking part in this study about your use of media. There are not many questions to answer		
<p>1. What type of music do you like best?  Please circle one: Indie / Guitar – Rock / Heavy Metal – Emo – Soul – Hip / Hop / Rap -  R&amp;B - Dance / House - Pop - Drum &amp; Bass - Garage - Other (please state)</p> <p>2. What group do you think your friends and classmates would describe you as being part of? Please circle one  Trendy - Goth - Emo - Chav - Skater - Greb - Punk – Other</p> <p>3. Why do you think this is? Please circle if it is your . . .  Personality - Clothes - Music preference - All three – Other</p> <p>4. Please circle the different kinds of electronic devices you use  PC/Laptop, Radio - mobile /smartphone - tablet pc / I pad - TV - music player  Xbox/Nintendo - other (if other please state)</p> <p>5. Please state how strongly you agree/disagree with the following three statements.  o My friends are really important to me; they understand me more than my family  1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Disagree   4 = Strongly Disagree  o I feel very much a part of my city, local town/community  1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Disagree   4 = Strongly Disagree  o I feel very much a part of my school community  1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Disagree   4 = Strongly Disagree</p> <p>6. How do you talk or meet with friends outside school? – circle the two most important ways:  in person / Face to face - text message - email - facetime/ skype - social media (e.g. facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, twitter)</p> <p>7 I feel very much a part of web community such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat  1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Disagree   4 = Strongly Disagree</p> <p>8. Social network is an important part of my life  1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Disagree   4 = Strongly Disagree</p> <p>9. Why do you use an online social network? (you can circle more than one choice)  To find information - To play games - To keep in touch with friends - To get opinions - To share videos, pictures, music - To share experiences</p> <p>10. The use of social networks helps me to find out who I am (my identity)  1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Disagree   4 = Strongly Disagree</p>		
<b>Many thanks for answering these questions</b>		

**Figure 5.1** The questionnaire (adapted from Cassidy and Van Schijndel 2011)

Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus is used to discuss how the social context in the varying 'fields' shapes young people as they are in the process of shaping themselves. Young people internalize 'rules of the game' and 'ways of being' from the institutional rules and interactions in their social context (68). Hence, the social discourse and values of the school are integrated into the students' attitudes and identity formation, as can be seen in the research findings discussed below. Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm will also be used in the discussion of the young people's identity formation.

With the ethical considerations and logistics completed I chose as my methodology a focus group approach. This approach provided the ability to capture deeper information more economically than individual interviews. The focus group also provided authentic insights into how the young people thought about identity and their use of media. In order to set the tone and for the participants to not feel too intimidated they were given beforehand a short questionnaire using a Likert scale and funnelling technique, with the first question being very general enquiring into the young person's musical taste and thereafter probing further and deeper. The length of the questionnaire was deliberately short using appropriate adolescent language and terminology. The results of the questionnaire were used to facilitate the later focus group discussion and were effective in keeping the young people focused on the topic area.

## A discussion of the findings

Popular media was represented through the music preference of the participants. The majority of the group preferred rock/heavy metal but rap and hip hop also proved to be popular among the group. However heavy metal and rap/hip-hop, have a particularly negative image, especially in the media. Media reports often invoke moral panics surrounding the negative effects on 'vulnerable minds' of the aggressive composition and dark lyrical content of heavy metal. Dan Silver, assistant editor of the music magazine *New Musical Express* (NME), in defence of heavy metal is reported as saying that 'many themes of heavy metal are about alienation. If you have these kinds of feelings there is a lot you can get out of the music and the community of fans who are into it' (cited in Fleming 2007). This is supported by research carried out by Miranda and Claes (2004) who found that music taste plays a unique role in explaining adolescent transgressive behaviours. Their research suggests that the unique explanatory value of music taste lies in the strength of the sociocultural identity some types of music can

offer. For example, in response to question 2 on the questionnaire Xander, aged 15, indicated that his group identity is dependent on his music preferences. He enjoys listening to rock music through his headphones and expressed an interest in becoming a Radio DJ although conversely he does not listen to the radio which would place him in Marcia's (1966) category *identity foreclosure* which in this case is little exploration of radio but a strong commitment to listening to rock music. On average, adolescents listen to music for up to three hours daily and accumulate more than ten thousand hours of active music listening throughout adolescence (Roberts et al. 2009). Moreover, time spent listening to music keeps increasing due to ever more media-socializing and multitasking smartphones and tablets. Xander's knowledge of music has resulted in numerous school prizes for the category of *Best Sound and Visual Effects* in film production as part of performing arts.

Other participants used question 2 to reflect on how others saw them. Brendon, aged 13, and Syrus, aged 11, who are both heavy metal fans have a developing sense of self with Brendon using a self-abusing language term 'dick head' to describe how others in the community regard him. When asked why he thinks this he replied because of the way other young people talk to him. During adolescence, when belonging to a peer group can become vital, language and naming is a primary resource to establish the self, social categories and social relations. It is the continual vocal branding of 'other' in order to identify 'self' and the combination of exclusion and bonding which make slang and swear-words especially attractive to teenagers (de Klerk 2005).

Syrus revealed that his peers often find him annoying and a 'funny little monster'; however he does not set out to be annoying but he does like to make people giggle. Although Syrus falls into the category of *identity foreclosure* he is also closely aligned to Marcia's category of *Identity Moratorium* as he is lively, engaging but conflicted, and sometimes tiring to be around as can be seen from the comment about being annoying. With adolescence come heightened interest, concern, commitment and conflict associated with interpersonal relationships, especially with peers. As yet these two young people are finding it hard to connect to a specific group identity but both felt a sense of belonging to the school community.

As discussed in the first part of this chapter, adolescence is known to be a period of exploratory self-analysis and self-evaluation ideally culminating in the establishment of a cohesive and integrative sense of self or identity (Erikson 1968). Based on Marcia's (1966) categories, Brendon and Syrus display *identity foreclosure* as they tend to correspond to the expectations of others. In contrast

Pratham, aged 15, sees his identity as being strongly tied to the words or label used to describe him in his Education and Health Care Plan (EHP). When challenged by others in the focus group that this label, a standard social and emotional problem child (Pratham's interpretation), is not his real identity he argued that without this label he 'wouldn't be me. This suggests something about how strong and influential labels can be. Certainly labels are harmful when, as a result of that label individuals are degraded, discriminated against, excluded from society or placed in classrooms without regard for their individuality but this is clearly not the case with regards to Pratham. Describing his identity as someone who is a sensible, trusted young man and, good looking, Patham clearly displays Marcia's category of *identity achievement* as using (Kroger and Marcia 2011) the description he impresses one as being solid with an important focus in his life and while retaining some flexibility he is not easily swayed by external influences in his chosen life direction.

In response to question 4, all research participants indicated that they use electronic devices such as Xbox and PlayStation on a daily basis. These are known as Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) which are fully developed multiplayer universes with an advanced and detailed visual and auditory world wherein players create an individualistic character (Griffiths et al. 2004). Brendon and Xander play online with each other, in their own room at home, thus maintaining their media related identity while away from school. They told me they also play with other friends online. Yee (2001, 2006, 2007) has carried out research into MMORPGs and notes that they allow new forms of social identity and social interaction. Yee's research has shown that MMORPGs appeal to adults and teenagers from a wide range of backgrounds, and they spend on average more than half a working week in these environments. Gaming devices such as Xbox and PlayStation encourage users to join an online global community of online players; in these virtual realms new social relationships are developed within youth culture when playing role- games. Forms of successful play and being able to cope with the technical challenges often lead young people to a feeling of success and personal self-stabilization. Furthermore in a virtual realm 'adolescents are able to express themselves as competent and powerful . . . and [*sic*] as a coping strategy . . . transfer forms of rationality recognised within the virtual realms to their real lives' (Dinter 2006: 239). Internet based role play was featured in a short film that Xander made as part of his performing arts coursework where he acted out different roles and characters from an online 'shooter' game which opened up powerful new perspectives around the difference between fantasy and reality.

Pratham identified using just three electronic devices: laptop, smartphone and TV. He told the focus group that he hasn't got time for playing games on the internet, or PlayStation saying that he is a busy person preferring to do more constructive activities such as baking. A recent media phenomenon that has had an impact on Pratham's identity as a baker is the television show *The Great British Bake Off* (GBBO, BBC). Joining Millgate's vocational catering course, Pratham learnt the skills and techniques of baking so proficiently that his teacher entered him into a local GBBO competition which he won much to his obvious satisfaction. Credit must also be given to the teacher whose understanding of how to blend the teaching and learning of baking skills with the ideas from the show enabled Pratham to discover both his talent and identity as a baker. With regards to GBBO, here is a perfect example of a factual entertainment mix that appeals across a double demographic; the traditional older audience and also the younger audiences such as Pratham with an interest in how to get on in the world of employment and/or business (Hill 2015). Here we see how secondary involvement of the media has impacted on Pratham's transformative learning and identity formation. According to Illeris (2014) when reasonable stable structures are gradually developed in more and more areas the young person has reached a situation or habitus in which identifiable patterns take form and a fairly comprehensive identity has been reached. However this does not always happen so easily as for many young people in today's neoliberal and globalized society identity development is considerably more uneven and problematic. This is because on the one hand there is an enormous variety of what could be seen as identity offers or suggestions, for example, in the form of celebrities as role models appearing in commercial adverts and mass media. There are also a range of activities, forms of behaviour and language use as differing form of expression that can contribute to identity formation. One example is the use of street slang and ungrammatical codes mainly made up from exotic terms. On the other hand there are more normative or conventional identity offers from society, policymakers, parents, teachers and the many categories of supporters who give advice, guidance and supervision, when at the same time they are trying to assist, to help, to push and to press young people through to a result that is acceptable and desirable to both the young people themselves and to society (ibid.). This serves to illustrate the long and often complex processes that young people today must cope with and overcome to fulfil the development of their identities.

The role of friends was evaluated through the findings of question 5 which showed that all the participants either strongly agree or agree that friends

understood them more than family. This is an expected result as in the course of adolescence, relations with peers assume increasing importance. Friends gradually come to occupy just as central a position in the relational network as the parents. However, only some of the focus group feel part of their local community. This is not surprising taking into account the multilayered and complex sense of identities and how young people relate to and engage within the wider world. According to Bourn (2008) young people are in one sense citizens of a mediated global culture but at the same time struggle for a sense of acceptance in the local societies in which they live. Where the young people in the focus group have a sense of acceptance is in the school community. It was clear from their comments that the young people in my study feel that there is a bond and friendship between staff and themselves. For instance, Xander feels that he has become a lot more caring about people and that the staff here are a lot more encouraging and that 'if you take time to get to know them they are not much different to being with the students. Given the role of the school community in the young people's personal, social, emotional and moral development, including attachment to the teachers and the residential childcare officers, there is good reason to believe that important links exist between the school climate and their moral and social identity.

The majority of the group meet with friends outside school through social media and face to face contact. Syrus, who is the youngest in the group, does not feel part of an online community but did circle all the choices with regards to the way he uses online social networks. He admitted to being too lazy to read a book and prefers to get his information from online news channels such as YouTube FTD News which is a new kind of visual targeting the younger audience with the strap line: *Stay up to date with the latest and craziest news Monday to Friday*. Whereas, earlier generations turned to conventional media such as newspapers and television to feed their curiosity and explore others' and their own identities, today's young people have an unprecedented array of powerful new digital tools to help them with these processes.

## Conclusion

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' I have endeavoured in my small-scale study to capture a sense of the mediated environment of the participants' lived experiences. Habitus describes the individuals' way of seeing, interpreting and acting in the world, in accordance with their social position and it is

internalized and consolidated in childhood and youth through family, educational structures and circumstances. What emerged from my investigation into the young people's use of the media was their strong sense of belonging to the school community. It was clear the residential provision is very well organized and run for the benefit of these young people who clearly had ownership of their own school habitus. This made my role easier as investigator, as the participants were forthcoming in their views about their own identity formation and the role media played in this process. This reinforces Bourdieu's notion that when 'habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a fish in water, it does not feel the weight of water and it takes the world about it for granted.

I turned to Marcia's identity status paradigm to understand further the young people's identity formation. However, I discovered that there can be a great variation in determining a young person's personal and social identity and I question whether or not the identity statuses are sensitive enough to measure the identity formation process. A broader longitudinal study is needed in order to provide more compelling results.

The study set out to explore a group of young people's quest for identity and the influence the media has on the formation of both their personal and social identity ownership. In this regard my aims were met however due to the small sample in one location. Larger-scale surveys using many locations are now necessary in order to make strong generalizations about young people's use of media. This brings to conclusion the discussion of the findings from my small-scale study.

This chapter began by unravelling what is meant by identity using a range of theoretical lenses. This was followed by an exploration of the media and its role in constructing identities. The final section was a discussion around my recent empirical small-scale study which set out to explore a group of young people's quest for identity and the influence the media has on the formation of both their personal and social identity.

## Notes

- 1 'Exploration' refers to the adolescent's active questioning and weighing up of various identity alternatives. 'Commitment' refers to the presence of strong convictions or choices.
- 2 Millgate School YouTube website: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpxXqwQokAR75mXFF1B7Teg>

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